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SUBJECT: SPIEGEL OUTLINES GOI PLAN TO REMOVE SOME OBSTACLES TO MOVEMENT IN WEST BANK

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Brigadier General (res.) Baruch Spiegel, advisor in the Ministry of Defense (MOD), briefed the Ambassador and Embassy staff on the GOI's three-phase draft plan for the reduction and removal of obstacles to movement in the West Bank. In Phase I, the GOI plans to remove a total of 28 checkpoints in the northern West Bank and west of Hebron. The roadblocks will be removed to increase movement between Jenin, Tulkarm, Nablus, and Qalqilyah, and at Beit Awwa, west of Hebron, and at Neveh Geva'ot in the Gush Etzion. He noted that Za'atara checkpoint (Tappuach Junction) would be expanded to allow more traffic to travel south of Nablus. Spiegel continued that Phase II would begin after a 2-3 month evaluation period, and will see the removal of 20 checkpoints around Nablus, including Beit Furik, Huwarra, Beit Iba, and Awarta, as well as at least four checkpoints in or near Ramallah. He expects these openings to reduce the travel time between the northern to the southern West Bank, depending on the capacity of the container checkpoint at Wadi Nar, east of Jerusalem. Spiegel welcomed U.S. engineering technical expertise to expand the capacity at the checkpoint. He told the Ambassador that Phase III would be implemented in sync with the completion of the separation barrier, and that the GOI will remove an additional 107 checkpoints in the southern West Bank near Hebron and adjacent to the seam zone. Spiegel did not have permission to discuss the important Hamra checkpoint in the Jordan Valley for Palestinians to access Route 90, but the Ambassador will raise this issue with Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz. The Embassy and OCHA will analyze the plan this week, and begin talks with the GOI on a mutually acceptable plan prior to the December 31 date specified by the November 15 Agreement on Movement and Access. End summary.

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General Overview  
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2. (C) On December 11, Brigadier General (res.) Baruch Spiegel, advisor in the Ministry of Defense (MOD), briefed the Ambassador and Embassy staff on the GOI's draft plan to remove obstacles to movement in the West Bank, as stated in the Agreement on Movement and Access. According to Spiegel, the plan will have three phases, and will reduce the number of obstacles to create "effective movement between regions" and greatly improve the economic and humanitarian situation in the West Bank. He explained that progress on the removal of closures would depend on the security situation, the relative effectiveness of Palestinian security services, the relative proximity to Jerusalem, and the presence of the separation barrier. He said that the Jerusalem area would be clear of roadblocks and other obstacles once the 12 planned terminals are built.

3. (C) Under what Spiegel termed "Civilian Considerations," he said the GOI would remove or reduce obstacles to movement based on existing roads, access between villages and city centers, access to bridges to Jordan, and access to the seam zone between the Green Line and the separation barrier. He noted that obstacles would be reduced to help the Palestinians go to hospitals, essential development projects, District Coordination Offices for permits, and back-to-back trade platforms. Among the components of the plan are reducing and removing obstacles, opening checkpoints in phases, implementing infrastructure development projects, improving roads and interchanges, strengthening field security and civilian coordination, building trust between the two sides, and reducing friction between settlers, the IDF, and Palestinians. Spiegel mentioned that the goals of the plan are to increase movement in the West Bank, create alternatives and improvements in current routes to minimize delays, and develop and encourage public transportation. He also said that this plan would "create a positive momentum and improve the status of daily living."

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Plan in Three Phases  
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4. (C) According to the IDF, there are currently 304 total obstacles to movement as of last week. (Note: OCHA reports 399 as of November 15. End note.) The IDF counts 253 roadblocks, 11 checkpoints, 11 internal checkpoints, and 29 seam zone passages. Of these obstacles, according to

Spiegel, the GOI plans to remove 28 in Phase I, 20 in Phase II, and 107 in Phase III. At the end of Phase III, the GOI expects approximately 120 obstacles to remain throughout the West Bank, probably surrounding the settlements that will be to the east of the separation barrier, according to Spiegel.

15. (C) Spiegel claimed that 12 of the 28 roadblocks to be removed in the first phase have in fact already been removed, north of Hebron. He explained that the GOI plans to remove the checkpoint at Beit Awwa, near the Green Line west of Hebron, and another roadblock at Neveh Geva'ot in the Gush Etzion. The remaining roadblocks will be removed from the northern West Bank to increase movement between Jenin, Tulkarm, Nablus, and Qalqilyah. He said he hoped that Road 57 could be upgraded to eventually connect it to Route 60 heading north. He also said that the checkpoint at Za'atara (Tappuach Junction) would be expanded to allow more traffic to cross through. Spiegel continued that Phase II would begin after a 2-3 month evaluation period, and would see the removal of checkpoints around Nablus: Beit Furik, Huwarra, Beit Iba, and Awarta, as well as at least four checkpoints in or near Ramallah. He assessed this would reduce significantly the time it takes to travel from the northern to the southern West Bank. Any remaining major delays would be "owing to the load at Wadi Nar," or depending on the capacity of the container checkpoint at Wadi Nar, east of Jerusalem. Spiegel said that Wadi Nar will be normally open, unless there is a terror attack, and welcomed U.S. engineering technical expertise to expand the capacity at the checkpoint. He commented that the Rimoni Junction would also normally be open, and asked for USAID help in upgrading Road 449 from Ramallah to Jericho. The GOI also expects to remove some roadblocks on Road 317 leading into Hebron from the villages near Yatta.

16. (C) Spiegel told the Ambassador that Phase III would take place with the completion of the separation barrier, especially in the southern West Bank near Hebron and adjacent to the seam zone. When the barrier is complete, the remaining roadblocks will be removed, he said. Spiegel reported that he was not authorized to discuss the Jordan Valley, and the issue would have to be taken up at a higher political level.

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The Pilot Assistance Plan  
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17. (C) Spiegel mentioned the possibility of a test pilot in which obstacles are removed in areas where international development projects are simultaneously being implemented, such as road and infrastructure development, water projects, and job creation programs. In addition to Road 57 and 449, he noted that Roads 354 from Tarqumiya to Beit Awwa, and Road 356 from Hebron to Bethlehem should be upgraded as examples for possible road projects.

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Additional Comments  
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18. (C) The Ambassador raised questions about the third phase, which Spiegel had left largely undefined. He noted that the USG could not agree to any plan without knowing where remaining obstacles would be and why. He also pressed for the GOI to consider ways of evaluating the impact of the removal of the closures. Spiegel agreed to begin talks in a subcommittee with Embassy staff and OCHA to increase transparency in the permit regime system, and in the operation and infrastructure of remaining checkpoints.

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